A PLEA FOR THE BEST

Brilliant Argument in Behalf of Purity in Literary Work.

Complete and Accurate Report of the Hon. W. P. Fishback's Address Before the Literary Union.

It was intended to print in full, in the Journal of Wednesday, the address delivered on Tuesday before the Union of Literary Clubs by Hon. W. P. Fishback, but through a misconstruction of orders only a portion of the paper appeared. The address contains so much of merit and the writer is so felicitous in expression, that the Journal believes it is doing the literary public a favor in presenting in full this admirable paper.

"Mr. Rudyard Kipling," said Mr. Fishback, "is reported as saying in London a few days ago that America is like a great camp or railway station, in which everybody is moving or preparing to move. In such a place the still, small voice of literature, which comes with its plea for composure and serenity, has small chance of being heard. The criticism of the young Englishman, though somewhat exaggerated, emphasizes the importance of the task which literature, and literature alone, can and must perform for this prosperous, bustling, avaricious land of ours; which, with all its boundless resources and opportunities, has, as yet, put so little of permanent value into the great treasury to which humanity must ever look for solace and support.

"I welcome you to-day as representatives of a tendency in the direction of a better state of things. The literary club should be an organization with a distinctive purpose to create, cultivate and strengthen a taste for what is best in literature. The phrase 'national literature' is losing its meaning, if it ever had any, and humanity is coming to understand that anything sound and wholesome and grand and inspiring in the realm of poetry, drama, fiction, philosophy and criticism is literature without reference to its source, be it American, Greek, Roman, German, French, English or Scandinavian. The 'world literature'—for which phrase I am indebted to Goethe—comes to mankind of all creeds and nationalities with the same message. The really great writers, whose works survive all political revolutions and transformations, are all cosmopolitan

"I suppose no one will consider that literary clubs are formed in Indiana for the purpose of creating or stimulating a desire for reading or writing. There is really something appalling in the multiplication of books in these latter days. Wood-pulp paper at one cent a pound, type-setting machines, steam and electric printing presses, furnish unlimited facilities for publication, and an overstimulated and ravenous appetite for all sorts of reading makes a market which never seems to be glutted. Books, nutritious, poisonous, and excrementitious, are spawned upon the reading public with amazing fecundity, and the horse-leech cry of 'Give, give,' constantly goes up from the barren, famished souls of those whose jaded appetites call for new stimulus. Doctor Johnson was wont to say 'Turn the boy loose in the library; let him rummage the shelves; let him browse ad libitum in the literary pasture, and he will find what is best for him;' by some sort of elective affinity, I suppose. This might be so in a library selected by a stern old moralist like Dr. Johnson, a library in which a proper quarantine has relegated to the top shelves and remote corners questionable books, and from which books unquestionably vicious had been rigorously excluded. With such a censorship the bad results from promiscuous reading would be slight. But that is a very different thing from allowing full inspection and free selection among the book stalls of the Rue Rivoli and back-alley book vendors in London and New York. When Madame De Stael says that the mischief of bad books is only to be corrected by good ones, and that the bad consequences of what she is pleased to term 'illumination' are to be avoided by making the illumination more complete, she shows herself to be a poor physician for the soul. To follow a dose of Flaubert with one of Tolstoi, and then to tone up the spirits by a liberal prescription of Zola and Ibsen, would not benefit the patient. An excursion into the dismal swamp of realistic drama and fiction, where, to use John Randolph's rather unsavory but expressive metaphor, the putrescent pages of Tolstoi, Ibsen, Zola, Maupassant, Flaubert and others shine and smell, and smell and shine, like rotten mackerel by moonlight, results always and inevitably in moral and intellectual deterioration.

PITCH THAT DEFILES.

"'There is a thing, Harry,' says Falstaff, 'which thou hast often heard of, and it is known to many in our land by the name of pitch; this pitch, as ancient writers do report, doth defile; so dost the company thou keepest.' And so the Christian Paul, borrowing from the Pagan Menander, tells us also how evil communications corrupt good manners. The man or woman emerging from a mud bath of realistic fiction has need to clamor with Lear for an ounce of civet to sweeten imagination. That such books should become popular, that young men and maidens should read and talk about them in an artless Japanese fashion, 'without a trace upon the face of diffidence or shyness,' is simply shocking. And to think that the pestilential brood of writers who produce this stuff call it literature, and by the aid of some critics are seeking to push from their stools the honored men and women who should rule in the literary world by divine right! Because Cromwell said, 'Paint me as I am—warts and all,' is no reason why the literary Jack Horners should be forever thrusting their dirty fingers into the weak and sore spots of our poor human nature and exhibiting the results of their discoveries. Many things are taken for granted as forming a part of our daily lives about which we do not care to write, or talk, or think. The truffle-hunting pig has an unerring nose for the excrescences which are found upon the roots of the oak, but I much doubt if he has any sort of conception of the towering majesty of the noble tree. When I am enjoying the beauty and fragrance of the pond lily, I do not take it as an act of kindness for someone to thrust under my nose a handful of the black muck in which its roots are imbedded.

"In the Nineteenth Century Magazine for April Countess Cowper makes a strong plea for purity and decency, and against what she designates as the 'realism of to-day.' She shows how the tendency to vulgarity and nastiness is strong in the arts of painting and sculpture, as well as in the realms of drama and fiction. I will quote a single paragraph from her admirable essay: 'We may safely say,' says she, 'that by some writers of fiction, in France, especially, we are given nothing but the worst side of human nature—exquisitely described, it may be, as to style, but none the less to be condemned; the fact that a book is called powerfully written not being, as is sometimes urged, excuse enough to condone all else. As we have already said, we are told that there are characters existing in every age and in every grade of life so utterly vile that there is not the smallest spark of good to be discerned in them, and if a writer chooses to reproduce such a character, it is intended to serve as a warning against the vileness and baseness he is representing. But, in the first place, the truth of this theory of total depravity may well be doubted. A universal law demands the good and the bad in men's natures as surely as the sunlight demands the shadow. * * * And moreover, in the second place, is the lesson thus taught by the modern pitiful exposition of vice and crime likely to be one of warning, or will not the falseness of the mode of teaching miss its mark? The harm done is not only, of course, by affording an education in the degrading things of life, but also, and mainly, because by the assumption that these are the ordinary occurrences in everyday life among the majority of our fellow-creatures, and by the exaggerated language and forced situations used, the importance of the evil is raised to such a degree over that of the good that all perspective and sense of proportion is lost; and even if touches of good are introduced, they are not intended to form part of the picture, and are far too hazy to attract any attention.'

MONSTROSITIES OF FICTION.

"Joubert, whose taste and touch were unerring, cried out a century ago in France, saying, 'with the fever of the senses, the delirium of the passions, the weakness of the spirit, with the storms of the passing time, and the great scourges of human life, hunger, thirst, dishonor, disease and death, authors may as long as they like go on making novels which shall harrow our hearts, but the soul says 'you hurt me.' These monstrosities of fiction, which may be found in booksellers' stalls, have no place in literature. A Jesuit father writing recently on the subject of the 'Future Punishment' says: 'If there is a sin which merely on theistic principles merits the severest pains of hell, it is the authorship of a bad book,' and in the same line Cardinal Newman asks: 'Shall he, the author of an immoral book, be dwelling in Abraham's bosom, who hears on the other side of the gulf the voice of those who curse his memory as being the victims of his guilt?' The multitudinous seas cannot wash and make clean the souls of those who are thus polluted, and if there be a hell, a very hot place should be reserved for those who in the realm of literature mix poison with the intellectual food they furnish to the public under the guise of literature. And those who sell and those who read are partakers in the author's guilt. If Simple Simon allows the pieman to go unmolested to the fair, he escapes the pains and penalties of promiscuous pie eating. I have seen 'locoed' horses in New Mexico. The loco plant is popularly supposed to contain an alkali poison. Its effects upon the horse are peculiar. The animal that once gets a taste for it seldom recovers. Whenever opportunity offers he gorges himself with the weed. He may look fat and sleek, but he has a lack-luster eye, and no amount of whipping and spurring can induce him to show any spirit. He loses all relish for his customary food. Corral him in the midst of fragrant stacks of new-mown hay and oats and he turns from them in disgust. He chafes against the fence, rubs off his hair, and abrades his hide in his struggles to get at the coveted weed.

"The victims of the realistic school of literature bear all these marks, and where ever one meets them, in parlor, boat, hotel, veranda or hammock, they are fit objects of compassion—incurable sufferers from intellectual paresis. It does not change the fact that the victims are unconscious of their terrible state, nor that they stoutly deny it. To use medical parlance, the malignity of the disease is emphasized by the way it which it juggles with its victims before it extinguishes their intellectual lives. It changes their personality, and they become to their friends a tearful memory and a terrible objective presence.

"'In the moral desert of vulgar literature,' says Carlyle, 'with its sand wastes and parched and bitter and too often poisonous shrubs, the writings of men like Richter will arise in their irregular luxuriance like a cluster of date palms with its green sward and well of water to refresh the pilgrim in the sultry solitude with nourishment and shade.' There is no dearth of good wholesome literature. Why then shall we take the bad? Mr. Mallock makes out his case, I think, when he seeks to maintain that Scott and Dickens surely, and Thackeray probably, are neither obsolete nor obsolescent. Even Professor Jowett, late master of Balliol College, Oxford, one of the best men and greatest scholars of the century, was not ashamed to avow to his friend, the poet Swinburne, that he considered Dickens as entitled to a place in the front rank of English prose writers. Such writers will, I suppose, survive even the destructive criticisms of Mr. Howells and Mr. Hamlin Garland. They will be read and enjoyed probably when the flash-light impressions of Mr. James and Mr. Howells and the smaller fry of the literary kodak school have been forgotten.

NEWSPAPER LITERATURE.

"And shall I pause to say a word about the sort of stuff which is purveyed to us by our newspaper press as literature? Omitting all mention of the Satanic press, which is evil only and that continually, is it not true that the constant reading of our great newspapers, which constitute a part of the reading of everybody, and all of the reading of a great many, has a tendency to spoil a taste for that which is best? If literary clubs have other functions, it is certain that it should be their aim to the utmost to form, encourage and correct the style of our writers. We must confess that in these days the waters of the pure wells of English are sadly defiled.

"We have heard it said that the style is the man, or, as Goethe puts it, 'the style of a writer is a faithful representation of his mind; therefore if any man wishes to write a clear style, let him be first clear in his own thoughts, and if any man would write a noble style, let him first possess a noble soul.' And nothing conduces so powfully to give one a lucid form of expression as a constant and increasing familiarity with the classics. I do not use the term classic in the scholastic sense which would limit its application to the masterpieces of Greek and Roman literature, but with the larger meaning which comprises what are the choicest and best productions of all times, ancient and modern. The great French Critic, St. Beuve, in his essay entitled 'What is a Classic?' gives a definition which my imperfect acquaintance with the French language will not enable me to translate accurately and I can only hope to give its spirit. He says: 'A true classic such as I love to define it is an author who has enriched the human understanding, who has really augmented its treasure, who has enabled it to make one step more on the line of improvement, who has disclosed some really new truth or excited some new passion in hearts where eveything seemed to have been known and explored, who has expressed his thought in a large way, sane and beautiful in itself; who has talked to everybody in a style that is new without neologism—new and antique at the same time—the contemporary of all ages.' That which has made and kept the French language so pure, that which has made it the serviceable medium of expression for all civilized nations in international affairs, that which has almost justified the extravagant boast of one of the great critics 'that it is the only language that has honesty attached to its genius, that it so sure, serviceable and reasonable; that it is, in fact, no longer the French language, but the human language;' that which has preserved in it all these excellencies is the watchful and jealous care of the learned men of France and the Academy who have for more than two centuries frowned upon all attempts to adulterate their vocabulary by the introduction of new and equivocal words which are the cause of so much that is obscure in the modern English prose writers.

"I cannot accept the canon of Mr. Pater, that because human life has become more complex it is necessary to speak or write in a gibberish equally complex and difficult to understand. Pascal, who may be said to have fixed the French language in the seventeenth century, in whose writings there is not a single obsolete word, whose genius for clearness of expression has never been surpassed, said of his style, which amazed his contemporaries, that in writing, it was his habit to write four words and erase three. Middling writers, as well as middling poets, are an offense to gods and men. The fussy anxiety for present recognition, the shouldering to the front, which is in such perfect keeping with our busy, hurrying American life, which Mr. Kipling aptly compares to a crowd at a railway station, degrades and consigns to early obscurity and perpetual oblivion many writers who, working with more patience and care, might be of permanent service to mankind.

"Jean Paul, who knew what poverty and lack of recognition meant in all their bitterness, could say, 'It would be my greatest reward if at the end of twenty years some reader as many years old should return thanks to me that the book he is then reading was read by his parents.' But Richter 'der Einzige,' as the Germans love to call him, worked upon a different plane and from different motives from those that inspire the brood of middling writers who, like buzzing insects to whom they have been compared, only have a capacity for annoyance. It may be possible that we may be living in the day of small things and should not despise them, but comfort ourselves with the philosophy of our quaint old friend, Sir Thomas Browne, who tells us not to seek for whales in the Euxine sea or expect great matters where they are not to be found. Schopenhauer says the great cause of the degradation of style comes from the neglect of the classics, and over and over again Goethe, speaking from his great height, and sweeping so wide a horizon with his clear vision, is telling us that there is through all art and literature, which is one of the greatest forms of art, a filiation. 'If you will see, says he, 'a great master, you will always find that he used what was good in his predecessors, and that it was this which made him great.' And again he says, 'a noble man, one in whose soul God has placed the capability for future greatness of character and elevation of will, by a knowledge of and familiar intercourse with the elevated natures of the ancients, every day make a visible approximation to such greatness.'

"The writer or artist who piques himself upon his originality as his chief claim to merit never does anything in a grand and perfect way. The greatest masters have never hesitated to appropriate and use what their predecessors have done; it is the way in which it is used that justifies or condemns the appropriation.

AS TO THE POETS.

"And what shall we say of our sweet singers, the poets? If, as Mr. Matthew Arnold prophesies, the future of poetry is to be immense, we must modestly admit that the poetry of the present, tested by any adequate standard of criticism, is, except in the matter of bulk, not immense. No one who has not been a newspaper editor can form the remotest conception of the quantity of rhyming nonsense which day by day goes to the waste-basket and paper mill. Much of it survives this fate and lives its brief day in the so-called 'poet's corner.' A great many humane, well-meaning and otherwise sensible people are apt to mistake the very common and easily acquired talent for rhyming for the divine afflatus which inspires the true poet. 'To write prose,' says Goethe, 'one must have something to say, but he who has nothing to say can still make verses and rhymes, where one word suggests the other, and at last comes out, which in fact is nothing, but looks like something.' Our own sweet singer, James Whitcomb Riley, whose great fame is only equaled by his modesty, speaks of himself in homely phrase as being nothing more than the whistle or medium through which come to us such ravishing strains of music. The poets and the great soprano singers are rare birds. We are fortunate if we have one or two in a century. Physicians who have had occasion to look into the throats of such warblers at Patti, Nilsson and Parepa, tell us that in the formation of their larynxes and vocal chords they find an explanation of that power which enables such singers to hold and thrill their audiences. I suppose that the throat of a nightingale or a skylark is not constructed on the same plan as that of the jackdaw or jay bird, and no amount of tongue splitting or training will enable jack or jay to rival his gifted fellows of the grove and meadow. It is cruel to the bird and excruciating to others to force him into such unequal and hopeless competition. I would not be understood as trying to discourage the efforts of young poets. If they have the genuine gift it will reveal itself not only to themselves but to the world also. But they should be quite sure that they have it. 'It is pitiful,' says a French critic, 'to see so many volumes of poetry written with so much trouble and care fall from the paternal bosom, where they have been nurtured and caressed, into a world of indifference. Of our very best poets, if we except a few great names, how much have they written which lacks the element of permanence? Mr. Arnold has done an immense service to Wordsworth's fame by collecting and condensing into one small volume most of the poet's work which is truly classic. And Robert Browning, realizing, before he died, that many readers would be appalled at the numerous volumes he had published, had the wit to put in a compact and convenient form that which he deemed best of his productions. In all that I have been saying I realize what was said of Schlegel's criticism of Euripides—that one who enters upon such a work should do it on bended knees; and so I feel in saying aught, by way of faultfinding, of the poets.

"There is one class, however, whose influence cannot be salutary. They have been called the lazaretto poets, who, it has been said, write as if they were ill. A companion who, unsolicited, pours into your ears the story of his bodily ailments, however well intentioned his efforts, does little to mitigate the asperities of railway travel. And the groaning poet who is always telling us how miserable he is, and is forever trying to analyze and explain to us the pain he experiences in his 'ain insides,' as Jeannie Carlyle phrased it, is not interesting to others. It is said that nightingales sing sweeter for eating caterpillars, but the nightingale does not eating about its caterpillar in dirt. Shelley could say that:

" 'Most wretched men
Are cradled into poetry by wrong.
They learn in suffering what they teach in song—'

but when they sing their best they appeal to universal human experience, and do not dilate upon their personal grievances.

"But I must close. It is my purpose to make a plea for a high standard in literary taste. When and as long as we can have the best, there is no excuse for frittering away our time upon what is common and inferior. I am not concerned about the fate of our national literature—so-called. It will take care of itself in due time. If we cannot to-day point to much in the way of achievement, let us consider that we are young, and that our field of opportunity is boundless. Above all things, let us cultivate the habit of keeping our minds open; let us be hospitable and receptive to all that is true, and honest, and pure, and lovely, and of good report; let us be unsparing in our condemnation of what is false and meretricious. 'Judgment,' says Rivarol, 'approves or condemns; taste enjoys, suffers, its laws are delicate and sacred. It gives its vote upon a glance of the eye. Its loves, its hates, its enthusiasms, its indignations are quick. Men of taste are the high justiciars of literature; the spirit of criticism is a spirit of order. It knows the offenders against good taste and carries them to the tribunal of ridicule; it is ravished by beauty, transported by the sublime, and is furious against mediocrity.'"

ALBERT EDWARD AT HOME.

Daily Routine of the Life of the Prince of Wales—Looks Like a Farmer.

New York Commercial Advertiser.

Two distinct sets are invited to the Prince of Wales's country seat; one from Friday to Monday and one from Monday or Tuesday to Friday, the former generally including a bishop, dean or canon for the Sunday service, two or three eminent statesmen, and a sprinkling of musical, literary and artistic celebrities.

You have found carriages and luggage vans awaiting what is known as the "royal train"—a special run just when the Prince is in residence—and you and your fellow-visitors have driven up to the principal entrance.

There you alight and are ushered by the footmen into a spacious hall or salon, where you are received with the distinguished grace and courtesy for which your royal host and hostess are so justly celebrated.

You have only time for a rapid glance at the massive oak carving and valuable paintings (chief of which is one portraying the family at afternoon tea, by Zichy) before you find yourself being conducted to the handsome suite of apartments you will occupy during your visit.

A cup of tea and some light refreshment and the dinner hour being 7:30 it is time to prepare. If you have not been here before let me give you a word of warning or you will commit the dreadful sin of unpunctuality.

Every clock on the place, from the loud-voiced one over the stables to the tiniest of continental masterpieces, is kept half an hour fast.

The ringing out of the hour thirty minutes before you expect it is startling in the extreme, and your maid or man has a bad time of it until you discover the discrepancy.

At last, however, you are ready, and in due time find yourself amid the company in the grand dining saloon, where dinner is served in state, although not with the frigid formality one is inclined to expect.

A certain degree of nervousness must be felt by all on the first occasion they dine with royalty, but your host and hostess are so extremely affable and have such a happy gift of putting people at their ease that you insensibly forget their august position and find yourself chatting with comfort and enjoyment.

The tables are oblong, the Prince and Princess facing each other at the center. The floor, as are most of them, is of polished oak.

In the drawing room after dinner there may be music—the ladies of the family are all good musicians—perhaps tableau vivants or possibly a carpet dance. If your tastes do not lie in these directions, or after you have enjoyed them for a sufficient time, you have the choice of using the billiard room.

In the morning you will find breakfast served at 9 o'clock in the dining saloon. As, however, the Prince and the Princess generally take theirs in their private apartments there is no formality, and you do not feel bound to the punctuality imperative when you meet their royal Highnesses.

Perhaps you have letters to write, and I may as well here remark that the postal arrangements are first-rate. There is a postoffice inside the house, which is also a money order office.

Three deliveries per day come in that way, while mounted men meet the trains at Wolferton Station. There is also telegraphic communication with Central London, King's Lynn and Marlborough House, and telephone to Wolferton Station, the stud farm, agents, bailiff, etc.

The Prince's morning room is a room plainly and usefully fitted and furnished in light oak. There you will see such a batch of correspondence that you will be inclined to wonder when it will get through, but the Prince is a capital business man, and nothing is lost sight of.

If, during your visit, one of the annual balls should take place you are most fortunate. There are three of them—the "County," the "Tenants'" and the "Servants'," the first, of course, bringing the elite, but the two latter sometimes presenting a curious mixture.

The tenants, I may say, are allowed to introduce a limited number of friends, a privilege highly valued and much sought after by the most remote acquaintance of each and every tenant on the estate.

A most wonderful display of colors distinguishes these Norfolkites, bright of hue, too, and more often than not dames of fifty got up in style of damsels of eighteen.

The dancing, too, is a study; country dances, reels and jigs following each other in such quick succession that the band in the gallery at the far end do not have any too easy a time of it.

Through everything the same kindly interest is displayed by the loyal host and hostess; their interest never wanes and their courtesy never flags, but every one is noticed and made to feel as much at ease as possible.

After the Prince has dispatched his necessary business he generally takes his visitors round to view the parks, gardens, model farm, stables, kennels, or whatever his Royal Highness thinks may interest them most.

If you are an enthusiast in farming you will be immensely interested in the six hundred acres of land farmed on scientific principles. Every known improvement in machinery, etc., is introduced with results of as near perfection as possible in crops.

The Prince looks a genuine farmer as he tramps through the fields in true Norfolk garb of tweed and gaiters; and it does not require much attention to find from his conversation that he quite understands what he is talking about, so it behooves one to rub up his weak points in this direction.

The model dairy is a picture, but here the preference must be given to that owned by the Princess. It is a Swiss cottage, containing five rooms, one of the five being a very pretty tea room, and here her Royal Highness sometimes favors her friends with the "cup that cheers," often, too, cutting bread and butter and cake with her own hands.

Moreover, the same hands have often made the butter that is used, as each of the ladies of the family is skilled in dairy management, and capable of turning out a good, honest pat of creamy Norfolk. Merry times they have had in this cottage, arrayed in apron and sleeves, doing the real work, not merely giving directions.

On Sunday morning everybody goes to the little church of St. Mary Magdalene, in the park.

The Prince and Princess set the example by their regular and punctual attendance, the Princess and ladies generally driving, the Prince and gentlemen walking by the private footway.

The Sunday afternoon is quietly spent in the house or grounds, then in the evening some may perhaps drive to West Newton or Wolferton Church—the Prince, Princess and family often do—while others may prefer to stay in for the music or reading.

Mangled in Transit.

Boston Transcript.

Mr. Spooney (to manager)—I want you to say to Miss Buskin that I do not regard her as an actress, but as an artist.

Manager—All right, old man. To Miss B.—I say, Spooney is dead gone on you. He says you are an artist, but no actress.

We are requested to announce that single seat tickets for the May Music Festival will be placed on sale on Monday at 9 a. m., at the Big Four Ticket Office. Date of Festival, May 15, 16 and 17.